

EXHIBIT 13

For Some Buyers With Virus Fears, the Priority Isn't Toilet Paper. It's Guns.

Gun shops and ammunition dealers say they've seen a surge in purchases, particularly from first-time buyers.

By Richard A. Oppel Jr.

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Daniel Hill had never bought a gun before. But last week he was in Larry Hyatt's gun store in North Carolina, picking out two of them: a 9-millimeter Taurus handgun and an AR-15 semiautomatic rifle.

His motivation: the coronavirus.

Mr. Hill, a 29-year-old kitchen manager in Charlotte, N.C., said he feared that the virus could lead to a breakdown of public order, with looting and robberies and "everything shutting down, like in a zombie movie" where society "just won't have any sense of lawfulness anymore."

Gun and ammunition dealers said they have seen an influx of customers with similar concerns in recent weeks, creating a spike in sales as coronavirus anxiety spreads. Reports of firearms and survival gear flying off the shelves have been widespread, including in California, New York, Washington State, Alabama and Ohio. Photos on Twitter over the weekend showed lines around the block at one Los Angeles gun shop.

Some dealers said an unusually high proportion of sales have been to first-time gun buyers.

"We attribute it mainly to the virus scare," said Mr. Hyatt, whose gun store has seen sales increase 30 to 40 percent since late February. The presidential election and stock market fluctuations have also been driving business, he said, and the store is now selling more than 300 firearms a week.

"People have a little lack of confidence that if something big and bad happens, that 911 might not work. We saw it with Katrina," Mr. Hyatt said, referring to the breakdown in emergency response after the 2005 hurricane on the Gulf Coast. "People haven't forgotten that a disaster happened, and the government didn't come."

Some major law enforcement agencies said they had not seen any sharp rise in firearms sales in recent weeks. Data from the F.B.I. show a sizable increase in background checks for gun purchases since the start of the year, though other factors, such as the national political campaign and gun control efforts by some state legislatures, including Virginia, could also be driving them.

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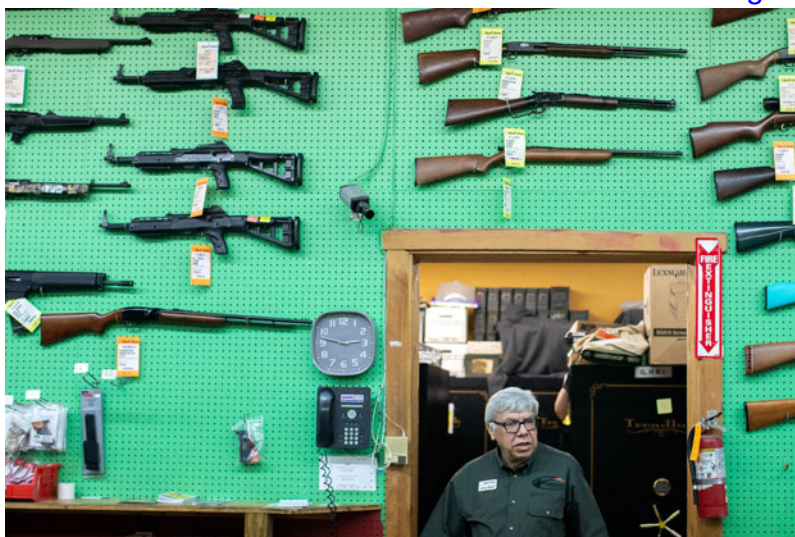
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Checks through the F.B.I. system leapt 36 percent in February compared with the same month last year, to a total of 2.8 million nationally — the largest year-over-year percentage increase in any month since July 2016 (another presidential election year). The agency processed more background checks in February than it had in all but two other months since it started performing the queries in the late 1990s.

January, when most confirmed cases of the virus were still mostly overseas, also saw a sizable increase in background checks, up 25 percent from the same month last year.

The background check numbers for March — when confirmed cases of the virus began to sharply spike in the United States and public measures to slow it took hold — will not be available for a few weeks.

Licensed firearms dealers like Mr. Hyatt are required to run those queries with the F.B.I. to ensure that would-be purchasers are not convicted felons or otherwise barred from gun possession. Private sales, including through gun shows, online marketplaces or social media, are exempt from federal background checks, so any change there would be difficult to spot.



Larry Hyatt, whose father opened the Charlotte, N.C., gun shop in 1959. The business is now selling more than 300 firearms a week. Logan R. Cyrus for The New York Times

Even before virus concern e calated or the stock market plunged in recent week , national politic were likely playing a role in ri ing sales.

Chuck Lowder, who picked up a rifle at Hyatt Guns last week, cited a testy confrontation between a construction worker in Detroit and former Vice Pre ident Jo eph R. Biden Jr, who i now leading in the poll for the Democratic pre idential nomination, about the candidate wanting to “take away our guns.”

Mr. Biden u ed a vulgarity to tell the worker that he wa wrong. While the former vice pre ident upport universal background checks and banning the sale of military-style semiautomatic rifles and high-capacity magazines, he also supports many types of gun ownership and own gun him elf.

Still, those moments can spur devotees to their favorite gun store, said Mr. Lowder, a retired brewery worker and truck driver who had come from Lenoir, N.C., to buy an AR 15. “When you’re told you can’t have omething, the fir t thing you want to do i get it.”

Even o, Mr. Lowder al o aid that the “unreal” number of cu tomers he aw in Mr. Hyatt’ tore la t week wa likely more about the fear of what could happen with the pandemic.

“When you’re told that the coronavirus i going to get you, and the TV and everything i ju t wamped with it, people tart believing it, and they get scared,” he said, adding that he also bought 300 rounds of ammunition, triple what he normally would buy.

Some ammunition suppliers said they also have seen a sharp jump in sales. Alex Horsman, the marketing manager at Ammo.com, said the pa t few week have marked the large t pike in order in the five year he ha been with the online company.

The company said it recorded two-thirds more transactions in the 11 days after Feb. 22 — when Google Trends indicates that search intere t for “coronavirus ” began a new urge than in the 11 day prior. Buyers in North Carolina, Georgia, Penn ylvania and Texa led the increase in sales.

As customers have been flooding into gun stores, demand appears to be outstripping supply among some wholesalers, said Andy Raymond, the owner of Engage Armament in Rockville, Md. “We’re getting tuff from di tributor ,” he aid, “who are aying, ‘Hey, due to high volume, we’re delayed in shipping.’”

Mr. Hill, the fir t time buyer in Charlotte, aid he thought ociety wa a long way from the full breakdown that he feared might be coming because of the virus.

“But you can tell it’ already taking a toll on everybody,” he aid. “If it were to keep going the way it i going, how bad could it get?”

Rich Oppel is a national enterprise and investigative correspondent based in New York. Since joining The Times in 1999, he has also covered business, Washington, a national presidential campaign, and for six years was a war correspondent in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

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The Coronavirus Outbreak

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